

A QUICK GUIDE TO SPOTTING COMMUNITY CENTERS OF POWER

Community centers of power — a term derived from civil rights strategist Bayard Rustin — **are organizations of, by, and for all the people in a community.** In a community center of power, *all are welcome, and communities speak and act for themselves*: telling their own story instead of letting others speak for them, acting together across differences instead of succumbing to divisions, and building and owning their community’s cultural and economic wealth.

Community centers of power are as diverse as the communities they represent. Some have their own brick-and-mortar buildings, while others meet wherever they can. What matters is what’s happening, who’s involved, and whether the power is held by the whole community or by a select few.

Administrative, marketing, and service-delivery organizations are usually **not community centers of power**:



Community centers of power are **centers of community life**:



To spot a community center of power, look for signs of commitment to the “ABCs”:

ACCOUNTABILITY

- Is the organization **accountable to the people, all the people**, of the community it claims to represent?
- Is the organization **part of the community** — not serving it from above or below?
- Do the people in the organization, including the people in charge, **reflect the full diversity** of the community?

BELONGING

- Can anyone take part and **feel like they belong**?
- Can everyone access all parts of the work? If there’s a building, **can everyone go everywhere**, including into the production areas?
- Do the spaces where the organization meets—and the stuff hanging on the walls—demonstrate **the organization’s central place in community life**?

CO-CREATION

- Does **everyone help set the agenda, make things together, and keep the value** of what gets made?
- Can anyone in the community step up and **participate in leadership**?
- Does the organization **adapt itself** to new participants, new challenges, and new opportunities?